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measles and small-pox, and the cruelty of the mothers towards their offspring, have combined to render their number so small. Now learn the cause of this inhumanity in the women. The mothers suckle their children for three years, during which time they have no conjugal intercourse with their husbands, who, tired of this long delay, often marry another wife. The women, therefore, kill their unborn babes through fear of repudiation, sometimes getting rid of them by violent arts, without waiting for their birth. Afraid of being widows in the lifetime of their husbands, they blush not to become more savage than tigresses. Mothers spare their female offspring more frequently than the males, because the sons, when grown up, are obliged to purchase a wife, whereas daughters, at an age to be married, may be sold to the bridegroom at almost any price.

From all this you may easily guess that the Abiponian nations abound more in women than in men, both because female infants are seldomer killed by their mothers, because the women never fall in battle as is the case with the men, and because women are naturally longer lived than men. Many writers make the mistake of attributing the present scanty population of America to the cruelty of the Spaniards, when they should rather accuse that

OF THE INFANTICIDE MOTHERS.

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847 of the infanticide mothers. We, who have grown old amongst the Abipones, should pronounce her a singularly good woman who brings up two or three sons. But the whole Abiponian nation contains so few such mothers, that their names might all be inscribed on a ring. I have known some who killed all the children they bore, no one either preventing or avenging these murders. Such is the impunity with which crimes are committed when they become common, as if custom could excuse their impiety. The mothers bewail their children, who [152 855] die of a disease, with sincere tears; yet they dash their new-born babes against the ground, or destroy them in some other way, with calm countenances. Europeans will scarce believe that such affection for their dead children can co-exist with such cruelty towards them while they are alive, but to us it is certain and indubitable. After our instructions, however, 177 797 847 had engrafted a reverence for the divine law in the minds of the Abipones, the barbarity of the mothers gradually disappeared, and husbands, with joyful eyes, beheld their hands no longer stained with the blood of their offspring, but their arms laden with those dear pledges. These are the fruits and the triumphs of religion, which fills not only Heaven but earth with inhabitants. When polygamy and di-

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vorce, the iniquitous murdering of infants, and the liberty of spontaneous abortion were at length, by means of Christian discipline, abolished, the nation of the Abipones, within a few years, rejoiced to see itself enriched with incredible accessions of both sexes.

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586 injuries is refreshed in the minds of the intoxicated guests, the relations fiercely avenge the dishonour done to the repudiated wife. Often, [587] too, women just cast off by one man are immediately married by another. I have observed [797] elsewhere that the younger women highly approve the law of Christ, and are anxious that themselves and their husbands should be baptized, because the perpetuity of their marriage is thereby secured, and their husbands prevented from changing or increasing the number (182) of their wives. This licence of divorce pro- (847) duces, as I have already related, bloody murders of children, and the incredible diminution of the whole nation.

582 You will find many things worthy of reprehension, but at the same time not a few deserving of praise, in the married state of the Abipones. I will inform you of those most worthy of mention. [795] Though the paternal indulgence of the Roman pontiffs makes the first and second degrees of relationship alone a bar to the marriage of the Indians, yet the Abipones, instructed by nature and the example of their ancestors, abhor the very thought of marrying any one related to them by the most distant tie of relationship. Long experience has convinced me, that the respect to consanguinity, by which they are deterred from marrying into their own families,